



# THE GRIEVING PART

*miles millikan*

*hi,*

*this one kind of is.....*

*y'know.....*

*lol!*

## 1. Ricky Pendergast

There was once a 10th grader  
Named Ricky Pendergast

Ricky Pendergast had been struggling very much in high school,  
He felt like every class he went into he was looked at as some odd thing.

He didn't know why he felt like this.  
He had....friends?  
He felt like he could name a few people he could call "friends"

But no one....  
Well, no one who spontaneously invited him over on the weekends  
Or who invited him out to the beach late on Friday nights  
No group that he belonged to,

And whenever there would be some grand hangout  
(Of 10th grader fashion)  
((So, like a kickback or something hahahahaha))  
He would seem to be just outside of the range of closeness to be invited

Why?  
ricky asked  
Is there something I could do so that people would just like me? like, so that everyone would  
just fuckin' like me?

Well yeah.  
his uncle responded  
'f Course there is.

W....what? what do you mean.  
ricky said, feeling very taken aback

and his uncle began,  
ricky, Every person who doesn't love you -- who **can't**, see, who **chooses** that they can't love  
you mmmm....Every one of those S O B's has got a version of you in their head....see? a  
version of you in their head that they think you **ought** to be. A version they consider your best,  
which really just means the version of you that would suit **them** the most, that would satisfy  
**them** the most....And they've simply decided to not let go of that idea. They've just decided,  
see, that they have you figured out, figured out how you *should* act....in a way that

would....maximize your potentialuhhhh.....**That** would make them a good person, They'd think to themselves.....*if only they acted **this** way.....that would be good.....*so, SURE heh, if you acted *exactly* as everybody secretly **wanted** you to. Read every person's mind and then molded yourself exactly to please every person's selfish expectation of you? Then, shoo, yeah, yu'd probably be the town favorite! BAHA!

and ricky's uncle really,  
just  
laughed at that one

really just laughed  
in his large leather chair  
with a glass in his hand  
and years of loneliness in-between his eyebrows.

and ricky sat  
with eyes agape  
having seen into some closet he wasn't supposed to.

But yuh can't do that, Ricky!  
his uncle continued.

That's the way a **fool** lives. Trynna please every'un around them? What on earth did **they** do to deserve so much of **your** spirit? You see? Of your **time**? Nuthin. That's the real answer – they didn't do nuthin' to deserve that much of your energy. Of yur **spirit**, you see? that's yours. Ain't matter if the whole world couldn't give ya the time of day, no one can **ever** take that from you.

Ricky's uncle said all this  
With one long and boney pointer finger outstretched  
And his lower lip plopped slightly out  
He sat back in his chair.

Yur time is what you got. And ya give things value by how much of your time you put into 'em. Someone said that once. Shoot, **lots** of people have been saying that for a looong time I think heh. Do yuh understand what I'm sayin' here, Ricky?

And Ricky felt like he understood too much.

Had understood absolutely every word that had fallen out of his uncle's mouth.

With crystal clarity.

With a clarity crisper than cracked ice.

Felt like the windshield of his reality had been wiped clean.

And for the first time.

Saw....

EveRythiNg.

He saw everything.

The inner workings.

The equations.

The...The

Ricky?

his uncle asked again

Ricky had been gazing at his own hands  
With those wide, agape eyes  
With eyes that had learned.

He looked up at his uncle  
Who looked down at him with his head cocked  
Looking down on him  
So that he was in the shape of some chicken.  
Some tall chicken.

**Yeah.**

ricky said, plainly

**Yeah, I.....Yeah**

he had no more words to say  
nothing more....  
nothing more

ricky understood something very different than what his uncle  
had intended him to understand....  
what his uncle would go back home thinking he understood...

See,  
Ricky's uncle felt very surely that he had given his nephew a piece of wonderful advice for  
strength  
For self-love, really

And, to be fair,  
Ricky's uncle *had* shared with his nephew  
A piece of advice that had really helped him so very much in his own life  
A piece of advice that, when he had picked up,  
Really changed him  
Really made him realize his imperfect and glorious worth.

But,

Ricky's uncle learned this lesson when he was 28  
And Ricky was 16  
...So  
Different  
Lessons were  
Conveyed. And

Now,  
Everytime Ricky sat in a classroom  
Or on the blacktop at lunch  
When he'd see the people  
Who'd walk around him  
Talk to him  
Or even were in his school's clubs with him

Ricky could **only** think,

*there's someone (1)you want me to be*

*there's someone (2)you want me to be*

*there's someone (3)you want me to be*

*who's that like?*

*there's someone (4)you want me to be*

*and there's even someone who (5)you want me  
to be*

*and if i only knew  
who that me was.....  
who they all were.....*

*then i could just be it*

*and you'd all...like me?*

*mathematically..*

*i really could..*

*i mean you'd all just  
have to like me?  
just like.....that?*

And this habitual thought  
Became so commonplace for Ricky  
That even when,  
as months  
and years passed,  
and Ricky would find himself in situations with people who really enjoyed his company

friends at bowling alleys, joking in class, playing basketball,  
even under string lights with a boy he found very cute

Ricky could still  
**only** think

*am i just  
being the you  
that you want me to be?*

*and if i wasn't being this me,  
wouldn't you  
just*

*walk away?  
leave me?*

Which gnawed at Ricky's pleasure in socializing.

So much so,

That by the time he was 19

He had refused to let anyone into his intimacy

Unless he felt like

He could change his entire identity overnight

**Every** single one of his values and virtues

And this person's love for him would be **completely** unchanged.

Unfazed.

So....

Ricky didn't have....uhhhhh

much....intimacy at all....really

for like.....

yeah, for like a while.....

until he was 24

which was the first time

someone saw him with eyes that wanted

but that wanted softly

wanted with a heart that had matured,

and had grown up a few times

when someone with those eyes  
saw him  
and said,

*...i like you the way you are, yeah?  
and like,  
yeah, if you changed, like  
maybe my like for you would also change.  
if it didn't  
i'm pretty sure i'd just be like, worshiping you?  
like a god? hahahaha  
which is like  
yeah that's like hahahaha  
kinda fucked*

And this happened to be said to Ricky  
While he was stoned  
And also 24.

so,  
ricky laughed  
actually

laughed at how ridiculous his own philosophy sounded coming out of this boy's mouth!  
how clearly....  
ridiculous!!! it sounded  
and,  
ricky

had another moment  
where he felt like he **understood**

but this time  
it didn't feel like....  
too much

it didn't feel like he was seeing something he wasn't supposed to be seeing  
but.....more like  
realizing the sweater on the chair in the middle of the night isn't a scary gargoyle  
that it's just a sweater....

and that night ricky and the boy kissed each other with their tongues

and they scrolled through memes together  
laughing  
laughing  
gosh, they were laughing  
and they made a huge batch of pasta  
and both ate far too much.  
laughing  
eventually started kissing again  
but  
stopped because ricky wanted to go slow  
and the other boy was a kind one who was in no rush  
and so they kept talking  
with grins  
and glistening eyes  
and giggly toes that  
tapped on each other  
like windchimes

and  
ricky went back home to his own apartment  
the next morning.

and  
the air tasted like ice water  
and the dogs walking with owners looked like beautiful paintings  
and the playground,  
was the sweetest music  
and even his own room,  
was warmer

and he sat there.  
on this worn mattress  
this resting place he knew so well  
with skin that had always felt so tight on his bones  
now felt bound by loose lace  
with a spaciousness so permeable  
it felt as if all the world's warmth could pass in and out of him in an instant  
like pure radiance.

and ricky pendergast enjoyed this feeling  
the whole morning  
ricky pendergast just enjoyed

this feeling  
quite a lot  
and then  
he took a nap.

and then  
woke up

some time later  
in the afternoon

with the sun  
quietly shimmering across the floor and walls of his room

and ricky  
pendergast  
felt distinctly  
as though he was in-between things

felt as though this place  
and this moment  
was certainly not a dream  
but **was** certainly  
not the reality he was familiar with

*so what of that?*

ricky thought to himself

*where am i?*

he thought to himself

he didn't even realize  
the answer  
fall from his lips

*happy?*

## 2. i miss you

*and so,  
they were in a garden.*

*the two of them,  
together*

*were together,  
in the garden*

*there, they spent all the time  
they could have ever hoped to spend with each other*

*they relaxed,  
and laughed*

*shared all the secrets they had  
always talked about sharing*

*they got lost in their love for each other  
because they were in the garden together*

*and the rest of the world  
seemed so misguided*

*when they were in this garden  
together.*

*“why doesn’t everyone just do this?”  
“lie down in a garden with someone they love?”*

why didn't everyone?

why didn't everyone.....

just lie down in a

garden with someone they love?

....

....

....

....

....oh

....right

....

....

and then....

\*sigh\*

and then one of the two of them  
just sorta

got up.

yeah.....

and walked **out** of the garden

.....walked.....

\*sigh\*.....

*idk, somewhere else.*

*and the **other** one*

*who was **still** there*

*felt now so **stupidly** aware*

*of **why** everyone doesn't just lie down in a garden  
with someone they.....*

*because now*

*this garden*

*felt moldy.*

*because This was their garden  
This was the place  
where everything felt like  
"why isn't everyone doing this?"  
This was the place  
that felt like  
The Answer*

*and now  
This Place felt moldy.  
The Place that felt like The Answer  
was now mold.*

*and can i tell you another  
reason it sucked so bad?  
the real Greek aspect of it all?*

*is that neither person felt like they were the one who actually got up and left the garden  
each felt like it was the **other** person who had gotten up and left*

*...even though there  
like,  
**was one who***

*did just objectively  
get up and just like,  
leave.....*

*whatever,*

*now,  
they **both**  
felt alone  
in a garden of*

*pff  
idk*

*memories or some shit....*

*what even was in the garden at this point?  
just shadows?  
is there anything solid here anymore?  
any seedling that isn't just  
some twisted sprout of an old nostalgia?  
is there anything here that isn't just a fucking empty shadow.*

.....

*even still,  
if it was true that neither of them had really left  
then were both of them just wandering around the same beautiful garden  
with mold over their eyes....?  
blind to the other's presence?*

*is that still?...  
some semblance of togetherness?  
is that still?...  
some type of connection?*

*can't they still be....?  
in a garden together?.....*

### 3. the Jazz Ant

There's a colony of ants  
                                   that live in a bathroom  
                                   in a house on the island of Kauai  
 They have swarmed the bathroom's toilet.

on the seat  
     and under,  
         even on the lever to flush.

and because this house has 2 bathrooms,  
                                   the two humans living there decided simply to never use *that* bathroom  
                                   "leave it to the ants"  
                                   they joked,  
                                   and so  
                                   the ants lived in relative peace.

but  
 this colony of ants,  
 does have  
 this *one* ant  
 who just  
 can't stop  
 singing jazz.

it's marvelous, really  
 how this ant  
 in a colony on Kauai  
 was able to even hear jazz  
 let alone feel it intimately enough to be able to recreate it  
 to be able to improvise it!

but,  
 ya know  
 she's an ant.

and it is not marvelous to ants  
 when another ant is constantly singing jazz  
                                   it is,  
                                   in fact,  
                                   rather  
                                   obtrusive

strange  
 mutated  
 misguided  
 distracting  
 convoluted  
 and weird

but this judgment  
 that the colony felt for the jazz ant  
 never pushed any individual  
 to kill  
 this jazzy ant  
 or even to expel her from the colony  
 just enough for them to be cold to her.

and so,  
 every morning  
 when the ants soldiered on their way  
 over to that toilet,  
 beginning their uniform scavenging routines

the Jazz Ant, see  
 began to wander off in zig zags

beginning,  
 her own day

of extrapolated nonsense

of marvelous misguidedness

purely improvisational nonsense

and whenever another ant passed her by  
 they tried their hardest not to present that they could even hear her

pretending to be so focused on whatever  
 they're lugging  
 that they "just didn't even notice you!"

and this is how the colony got along  
for very long  
until the Jazz Ant got very old, in fact

who still kept on improvising.  
even in her decay of body.....

and yes,  
to anyone truly steeped in jazz  
they would recognize that this ant  
had evolved into having quite a sophisticated mastery of this musical style  
expanded upon it, even  
expanded upon it so far that humans themselves would have learned many things just by  
listening  
to Jazz Ant.

but no one *was* there to tell her that  
because the owners of this house never went into that bathroom  
and because none of the *ants* knew jazz  
none of the other ants found *any* strength  
in what she found life in.

and so  
as she entered into her ancient years,  
the colony was just beginning to hear her disruption as **part** of *their* music.

this is not to say the ants were enjoying her  
or her jazz  
she was still treated as an oddity  
and if you asked any one of them,  
every ant would tell you just how annoyed they were  
by that "darn Jazz Ant."

but in an unconscious contamination of thought,  
she had become *their* odd Jazz Ant  
she had indeed settled into some strange place in the family  
even if on the outskirts

and centuries later  
 when the humans were all but ash  
 and this world made only the sounds  
 of scuttering scavengers.....

the colony still thrived.

around an eroding toilet bowl  
 and would tell stories

of some....excitement  
 that once existed  
 within this colony  
 some **extraordinary** strangeness

and the ants as a collective loved this story  
 so much  
 it would even be used  
 as a transition out of awkward pauses of silence

*"kinda crazy how we once had that ant that sang gibberish all the time, huh?"*

and whatever ants were in that awkward silence  
 would say things like "hmmmm" and "gosh" and "oh yeahhh"  
 and these were genuine exclamations of awe  
 all the ants floating into some deep, philosophical introversion for a few moments.

.....

when did the colony  
become capable of philosophy?  
how did they become capable of dreaming?  
of nostalgia?  
was it really just that one guy?  
was it how they all treated her?

when did the colony go from  
despising her  
to treasuring her?

there doesn't seem to be a clear day,  
there doesn't even seem to be a first time one of the ants loved her

but if you were able to see  
all of the ant colonies in the world  
this one,  
now in a world of ash  
this one was one that was the most dream-filled.....  
and *that*.....

....

...

....

that  
*has to count*

.....

for something

....

.....

, right?

#### 4. the hairy guy.

*remember those kids?  
those kids that walked to school together?*

*there were 4 of them.....*

*i can't remember their names....*

*but i remember a color each of them usually wore.....  
idk why.....*

*uhhhh.....*

*yellow  
red  
black  
gold ?*

*gold's pretty similar to yellow....  
but the names sound different....  
plus this gold thing was like **gold** it was very much **not**.....yellow....  
i'm getting carried away, sorry.....  
memory sessions'll do that to me*

*okay,*

*so*

*the 4 kids*

Gold, Yellow, Red, and Black would walk to school  
Every single day

And on their path a garden lay  
A floral wonderpatch

But in the green  
There was a sheen  
A beast named tales of old

Great, big  
Monster  
lived there.

It had white hair  
**Long** white hair  
That fell down to the grass  
Hair of such volume  
It concealed any outline of legs or body

The monster was huge  
The size of 20 kids piled onto each other  
Maybe even bigger....  
Maybe he was just sitting....  
Maybe if he stood he'd double in size...  
No one had ever really seen him move  
At least Yellow hadn't  
Because she asked,

*you ever seen the hairy guy move? run? walk?*

And the group laughed  
Quietly  
To themselves  
Stalling on what to say  
Yellow was the youngest of their 4  
So they had to teach her right.

*i once heard it run through the streets,  
the vibrations from its footsteps made the whole city's  
car alarms go off  
dogs were barkin' for days*

*i once heard it's kept tame  
by being fed by our parents  
sacrifices of cows or goats  
and i heard he eats 'em in a swallow  
like it's nothing.*

*jaw opens up like a whale shark, is what i know  
and he has 3 sets of retractable teeth*

3?!  
this was yellow again.

*yup 3.  
but it can retract them if it wants to swallow larger objects*

*or to appear more docile.  
this was red.*

*whaddya mean?  
why would it want to appear docile?*

*so it can lure.*

*lure???? lure what????*

*it lures.  
kids.*

*like us kinda kids??*

*just like us kinda kids  
it lures them in with song.  
enchanted song  
before you're close enough, it  
makes its appearance look  
as harmless as possible  
and once you're close enough,  
they say its eyes have a  
hypnotic quality  
that once you look in you can't leave  
and then he just  
eats you.  
and you let him.  
he just picks you up and just  
eats you.  
just like that.  
and you just sit there  
and you just let him do it*

*W..  
WHAT*

red nodded her head.

*there are tons of kids who've  
been lost to him.  
keep your distance.*

and yellow did.  
she did  
she did  
she did

for a while....

but

slowly

on the walk passed the garden

she'd started to hear

a whistling tune....

something sweet.....

something that she knew was the giant the first time she heard it  
despite it sounding far sweeter than the hideous of the monster the group had described  
yellow just knew

but, with her friends' voices in her ears,  
 she muffled it out  
 and heard it as just a passing tune  
 like walking by a store with tv's in the window.....  
 just one of the sounds on the school walk....

and that worked.....

.....

for a while.....

until yellow  
 found herself humming the tune while alone in her bed,  
 and then singing something all her own, yet inspired by the melody,  
 then thinking about where the beast's song *could* go next,  
 and what the beast looked like when he sang it,

was he expressive?  
 did he have an expressive face when he sang?  
 or was he a more concerned and focused singer?

and then on the school walks,  
 she found herself drifting into silence  
 right as they'd pass by the garden  
 she'd turn her head,  
 trying to catch a glimpse  
 of the singer itself

but she never could.  
 all she could see was the top of its head  
 white fur rising and falling like the waves  
 body tucked behind rows of bushels and trees

and then,  
the moon was full.

and Yellow lay awake  
in her bed  
gazing out the window

somehow positive  
she could hear its song  
through the glass  
and down the blocks.

she swore she heard it  
and she swore it didn't sound scary

and with no one else's words in her head

she snuck out.

creeping through the neighborhood nighttime  
it sounded like midnight, but felt like noon.

and suddenly she was standing,

at the garden's edge.

daytime  
on her walks.

the song was different  
than what she would hear in the

only slightly,

slightly louder

slightly more explorative

slightly more dangerous

that word

dangerous.

singed at yellow's fingertips

and made her heart whine

but not cower

this was not that kind of danger

she began to walk closer

*through the garden*

*dripping into music*

*swallowing your before*

*the licks and lilt of a nighttime wondersong*

*dancing around your head*

*like ribbon*

*like sheet music risen up from the page*

*you notice the birds  
there are birds slipping around you*

*birds of kaleidoscopic colors  
strange birds  
strange sounds*

*jungles and deserts and snowflakes and mountains....*

*you hear the song so close  
loud  
you hear that it really....*

*whatever it's coming out of*

*is big.*

*woah.*

yellow stopped  
for the first time since entering the garden  
the magnitude of the sound made it far less calming than it had been before  
this sounded much realer

much stronger  
it made her whole body vibrate  
like being up close to a concert amp.

the song stopped,

so did the birds.  
all that can be heard are the crickets beyond the garden  
but within?  
the air was still  
it was anticipation.

she didn't know why she did it but  
yellow walked through the last row of branches

he was big.  
draped in white hair  
that unfurled onto the grass  
pooled itself into knots  
no figure of any body part could be seen  
behind the cloak  
only its

he was beautiful.

eyes.....

*his eyes were rubies  
they were small,  
concise,  
condensed,  
reflective,  
honest,  
pure,  
beautiful,  
radiant,  
thin,  
shallow,  
glass-y,  
tormented,  
scared,  
and unbelievably  
human.*

the hairy giant and the yellow-socked girl looked at each other

the birds had not started up again  
but the dragonflies and fireflies *had* begun floating once more  
so in this sea of gliding stars.....

the two of them looked  
 beautiful in the moonlight

they all did....

yellow remembered the stories of kids being eaten  
 remembered the monster's mouth unhinging  
 where was its mouth?  
 oh god it had worked, she thought  
 oh my god i'm hypnotized

and her whole body fell towards a sprint

but was  
 stopped  
 by a tone.  
 single,  
 softer,  
 and quieter.

the creature's eyes were closed  
 and held this tone for a very few moments  
 sounding like stones skipping across a pond  
 like the alarm bells to the solar system

the tone whispered to a silence  
 and the creature opened its eyes to look at yellow  
 frozen in mid-flight

looked in a way to ask,  
 to make sure,  
 " quiet enough? "

yellow fell again,  
 this time into a smile  
 as she nodded her head and  
 her body softened to a kneel

the creature smiled too

closed its eyes,  
and began to sing.

SUDDENLY!!! IN THE MIDDLE OF YOU READING ALL THESE STORIES!!!!

:)

**5. an interlude of introversion**

A HOLE OPENS UP ABOVE YOU

JUST, SOME SORT OF SPECTRAL HOLE

AND THROUGH THE HOLE

FLOATS

AIMLESSLY

AN ANGEL!

IT LOOKS JUST LIKE AN ANGEL

AND NO NO, NOT LIKE "AN ANGEL"

IT LOOKS LIKE **AN ANGEL.**

RIGHT!?!?

**AN ANGEL!!!!**

IT FLOATS INTO YOUR ROOM

AND IS UH.....A LITTLE UNBALANCED HONESTLY

OH!

OH

HAHAHAHAHA

IT'S HIGH!!!!

ITS EYES ARE A LITTLE DROOPY AND DEFINITELY RED

OMG IT'S DEFINITELY LIKE, TOO HIGH

BUT DON'T UHHH

DON'T LET IT KNOW THAT YOU KNOW

I DON'T THINK IT WANTS YOU TO KNOW THAT  
THEY MIGHT GET REALLY SELF-CONSCIOUS ABOUT IT

*heyyyy, what's goin' on?*

*just wanted to swing by*

*, you guys just all seem to be uh*

*like*

*FREAKING out about everything*

*....hahahaha*

*well not really*

*it's just.....*

*yeah like,*

*i know there's a MILLION things to like, ..... "fix"*

*like things you need to um.....*

*like fix! you know like hate and you're*

*trying to solve hate which is.....*

*valiant.*

*but.*

*.....yeah i've just been seeing you guys, like*

***really***

*like going **in** on yourselves?*

*really being like.....*

*kinda mean to yourselves.....*

*just about how you're like*

*living?*

*and*

*feeling?*

*and like*

*whether or not you have enough strength*

*to make breakfast one morning?*

*or how*

*long you feel heartbroken*

*or lost*

*for?*

*idk*

*like things that in and of THEMSELVES are like, not a good time haha*

*and yeah, like THOSE are the times you're hardest on urselves....?*

*i think cause u think the most change needs to happen like,  
if things are really bad then like something's gotta CHANGE*

*which,*

*yeah*

*is valiant.*

*but,*

*sometimes there aren't*

*things to change, you know?*

*or at least no things that YOU can change*

*and,*

*trust me*

*everything*

*has things that they can't change.*

*there is something above everything....*

*you guys have gotten really good at fooling yourselves otherwise though haha.....*

the angel floated into sitting on top of that wooden dresser you have  
they're really seeming to get settled into ur room

it's sweet :)  
it's trust

*and so i'm just kinda worried about you guys, i don't know*

*i like you guys....*

*i like, LOVE you guys....*

*idk why about that one*

*i just really want you  
to be nice*

*to urselves.....*

*idk.....*

....

and i think the angel did have more to say  
not a ton more  
they got out what they *really* needed to.  
but i think, in private, they'd tell you they had more they wanted to say  
but  
hahahahaha  
no joke?  
they were too high and started getting anxious and paranoid.  
started thinking about how you're perceiving them

and how they're also an angel.  
and you're also a human.

and they didn't know if any angel had actually ever been *seen* by a human before  
so uhh  
they started feeling like they might be currently causing a cosmically large event

so  
 they uhhh  
 just lifted their head towards you  
 smiling  
 seeing you  
 mf'ing BUG-EYEING them hahahahahaha

cause this **angel's** just been MONOLOGUING at you so of **course** you're like 🙄

hahahahaha

and so,  
 they just slowly  
 drifted back up  
 into the hole,  
 pretty awkwardly really  
 it was a pretty awkward moment  
 in your room  
 with an angel.

and as they  
 floated through the hole  
 the sides of the hole  
 folded over each other  
 like how a  
 grandmother folds a picnic blanket  
 and the creases somehow just seemed to flatten themselves out,  
 and the hole was gone.  
 and any traces of it had totally vanished.

and it was just

you

again.

and you took the time you needed to  
 scoffed, shaking your head,  
 thinking,  
 "damn, mercury's gotta be in retrograde 'er some shit"

and then  
 you kept reading.

## 6. "I am the sun."

there was this boy,  
 this young boy  
 young boy with dark skin  
 who was sitting on a beach  
 by himself.

up in Northern California  
 not very close to the house he lived in  
 the college house he shared  
 with 4 other boys

Magic,  
 {which was the boy's name}  
 {i know, i know,  
 he had really cool parents}  
 had been coming out here  
 pretty frequently this last month.  
 he had started feeling a spiritual significance with this place

3 weeks ago his mom died  
 in a freak accident  
 where a Trader Joe's roof collapsed  
 killing 31 people  
 magic's mom being one of them.

and in other times,  
 magic wouldn't really  
 consider himself  
 a very spiritual person  
 but everything magic thought he  
 knew about evrythng  
 had essentially been lit on fire  
 in these last three weeks

nothing felt real.  
 no truths felt true.  
 all answers seemed.  
 to lead to.  
 the same.  
 bottomless darkness.  
 the same.  
 bottomless questions.

so,  
 magic feeling a little more spiritual than normal  
 finding some spiritual significance in some place by his house  
 he'd otherwise overlook  
 was nowhere near the strangest thing in his life

magic longed for the day when him feeling like a weirdo was the biggest anxiety he had.

*god i would kill*

*to get to just be weird again.*

and at  
 that moment.

as magic was dripping a fistful of sand  
 onto his right knee,  
 the sand  
 began falling  
 with  
 extreme  
 slowness.

parachuting through hardening cement.

magic saw  
 and stared at it

eyes squinted  
 eyebrows furrowed  
 he turned his head to the right,

but his head left a trail of heads as it moved  
 and magic felt all of them as his own

a moment where his head existed in many places at once  
and those other heads evaporated away  
after-images that remained only for a few seconds

*ugh, alright, what the fuck is this*

magic saw  
    raindrops falling ever so slowly,  
he hadn't even noticed it was raining until now.

he looked over to his left  
head-tracers disorienting him along the way

and to his left he could see the waves

well,

A wave  
near the shore,

having just completed its rise up  
it had just begun its crash  
but collapsing ever so slowly it looked almost frozen.

so magic looked up,  
above him.  
and  
when the warping of his heads receded  
magic saw,  
a bolt of lightning.

directly above him.  
moving,  
down towards him  
very  
slowly.

but certainly faster than everything else he'd looked at  
 even faster than the rain falling next to it

so, magic started feeling pretty fucking SCARED  
 (obvi)

but even his heart,  
 which only wanted so desperately to start racing

was too slow  
 to expel even a thump.

magic was suspended in this experience,  
 alone.  
 without even his body

without even....  
 his body

so magic  
 looked back to his right  
 and saw  
**now,**  
 someone who was sitting next to him  
 someone who looked very human  
 but not someone magic had ever seen before

they looked really androgynous,  
 magic couldn't guess what gender they were  
 which magic actually liked better when meeting  
 new people.

they had dark skin too  
 not dark like his,  
 theirs was a little lighter  
 and a little....warmer?  
 and they had really thin, really shiny black hair that  
 only fell to their forehead.

and they were looking up at the lightning too.

*uhhh hey?*

( ^magic^ )

*you're talkin' to me?*

( ^stranger^ )

*obviously,  
who are you?*

*oh, gosh uh*

*i dunno.....*

*i think i'm just me?*

*who are you?*

*uhhhh*

*i don't know, man  
my name's magic*

*woah, cool name*

but magic was  
so accustomed to this compliment  
– having a name like magic  
that he had made a habit  
of just not responding at all  
when it's said

*dude what's this  
lightning doing?*

*oh uhhhhh yeah*

*well it looks like it's  
heading for you*

*y...yeah*

*why is it  
why's it doing that?*

*o, you mean like the physics of it?*

*i mean like am i about to die?*

*oh.....that.....i do....  
yes, you're about to die.*

they both stayed quiet for a second.

*did you....  
are you real?*

*definitely.  
yeah, definitely  
but no one ever thinks i am at first  
so your suspicion is not like,  
a-typical, is what i'm saying*

*are you like here for me?*

*huh.....maybe....  
i guess the only other option is i'm here for me,*

*but  
but did you....  
did you choose to be here?  
did you.....*

*uh....no i don't think so  
i'm just kinda tossed around like this*

*wait – you've – ?  
have you been in a situation  
like this before?*

*i mean –  
uh, this is kind of the only situation i've ever  
been in.*

*i'm sucked to one person who's  
about to die  
and then when they...die  
i'm just sucked over to another person  
who's about to die  
and then just....so on*

*holy shit  
what?  
this is....  
i'm gonna **die**?*

*.....yeah*

*you're sure?*

*the other person  
just looked up  
and,  
then magic looked back up  
the lightning shooting off thin little roots  
as it unfurled towards their spot on the beach*

*yeah.....*

*that's....  
really coming for me?*

*....it looks that way, yeah*

*holy shit.....  
why?*

*god i don't know  
i don't think there's a reason*

*w – well why are you  
why the fuck are you  
why is it not....  
why....are you not.....*

*magic looked at their person  
who was now looking back at them  
wordless, confused too*

*and they were quiet again.*

*magic looked down  
at the sand this time*

*has anyone ever been able to  
like avoid it? get out of it?*

*....no*

*damn  
.....  
damn.*

*damn, that's kind of fucked up that you have to just  
like, watch it  
over and over.....*

*do you like serve god? are you an angel?*

*oh i don't serve....  
well if i do i've never met them  
this is all i know  
there's not like....  
i don't converse with the  
power above me.....  
which is the distinct characteristic  
humans seem to have  
about angels  
but.....  
no, i don't get answers.  
same as you.*

*how long  
you been at this?*

*oh god  
how long?  
.....um*

*magic recognized the grief  
recognized the shatter in their inhale*

*sorry. don't. don't worry about it.*

*there was quiet again,  
both looked back  
up at the crawling death*

*can you....*

*am i allowed to ask you....  
are you allowed to --*

the stranger took magic's hand in theirs

magic felt shock,  
relief,  
care  
and then started crying.

but it was still too slow.

no tears fell  
his heart just wept to breathe.  
to heave  
and his tears longed to fall

he just tried  
focusing on the present moment  
tried meditating, essentially  
because that mindset and practice  
had been really helping him  
through these last few weeks  
so he shut his eyes  
and

heard  
!  
the waves  
the waves?  
he didn't know how

but he didn't want to open his eyes anymore  
didn't want to explain away the illusion.

so he just heard the waves

and felt  
 the hand  
 wrapped around his own  
 and....  
 smiled?  
 jesus....

and the lightning kissed the top of magic's head

raced through every hollow bone and open vein  
 every muscular tissue  
 every pocket of marrow

electricity shuffling its way down every avenue  
 eyes flipping open in extraordinariness,  
 his fingertips had become eccentricism,  
 they had become rockets.

there was no pain, but there was no comfort  
 and despite the  
 overwhelming sensation  
 the unbelievable  
 accumulation of feeling  
 his mind was echoing a single phrase

**"I am the sun."**

with lightning through him,  
 with waves around him,  
 he felt the centerness of his purest essence,  
 in the middle of all things  
 being observed  
 by the quantum world  
 as pure royalty

and then he had his next thought.

**“how futile all that. feels now”**

**“how. whole i feel now”**

**“what does. *that* mean?”**

**“am i. alive?”**

and then the lightning struck the sand  
and a boom rang out.

and wherever in this universe his mom was  
magic was now there.

the event startled very much the closest person,

which was a light-skinned man in his 50's  
who was asleep in a public bathroom  
5000 feet away

who,  
shocked awake from his unexpected daytime rest  
still between  
his dream and reality  
grumbled only one word  
before falling right back in,

LUNATICS.

## 7. Cloud's tale

we were over florida.

like,

uhhhh

600? feet off the coast of South Beach

(which is in Miami).

it wasn't a cloudy day at all,  
there were purely blue skies  
everywhere,

but

in this one spot

due to scientific reactions far too complicated for this writer to list out or know  
a cloud formed.

it was

really frail

and

in fact,

almost skeletal

it just

drifted

into a floating existence

*huh?*

it thought.

and it wasn't sure  
where to go  
after that.

*huh?*  
*what?*

andthen,,,

*woah*

its backside was

all of the sudden,  
disappearing.

*wait*

*wait*

it was already half the size it was 5 seconds ago

it was being

blown.

it was feeling wind

but did not yet know that was the name

of the thing dissolving its body away

but its body *was* dissolving

and it *could* feel that.

its body now only a quarter  
of its 10-second-ago size

*hmm....*

and the wind blew hard

and the cloud

with only a drop of its head left

looked down

and saw

this....

blue?

blue....

wow

it wrinkled like  
like.....

well the cloud didn't know!  
cloud didn't have anything to make a simile out of

but it saw this....blue

and it wrinkled....

and it....

*oh!*

*oh!*

and the cloud was gone.

and the sky was clear again.

## 8. "We're....Stuck!"

*somewhere,*

*deeply far from the planet you ~probably~ live on*

*there is a galactically large black hole*

*about 1000x the size of Earth*

*(the planet you ~probably~ live on)*

*which isn't actually that big for black holes*

*but is still*

*pretty monumental*

*it rests*

*in distortion*

*omitting a low and ominous hum*

*rolling through the thick vacuum of space*

*and, as is typical during the life of a black hole*

*a star was drawing close*

*a star that had been drifting towards this black hole,*

*unknowingly,*

*for the last ten thousand Earth years or so*

*and it was drifting to the point of closeness*

*where the gravitational pull of the black hole*

*would become so strong on this little star*

*that the star itself would be ripped apart*

*torn*

*and split.*

*shredded into oblivion*

*atom by atom.*

*until it is completely devoured and*

*there would be absolutely no trace left  
of the star.*

---

*now,*

*there was no conversation that happened*

*between that black hole and that star*

*as this destruction occurred*

*however,*

*\*ahem\**

*if a conversation were to have happened*

*i think it would have gone like this.*

---

oh. hey!

oh! hey

i...uh  
you're the thing  
that's been pulling  
me for so long?

y....yeah i think so

o....uh....okay!

wow, hey!  
i've been wondering  
a lot  
what you were gonna  
look like

oh haha, yeah i bet.  
how do i hold up?

you're uhhhh  
gosh, you're  
really big!

oh  
yeah  
yeah....

:)

hey  
i just uh....  
(shit)

what's wrong?

i always --  
sorry  
i always start crying when --  
and i can't speak very clearly once i --  
(shit)

are you....  
is everything  
okay?

look, i just don't....  
UGH!!!!

oh uh....

I JUST DONT WANNA SHRED YOU APART!!!

oh....hey

I DONT WANNA KEEP  
FUCK  
IM SO TIRED OF THIS  
I DONT KNOW  
I FEEL SO BAD FOR  
WHAT I  
UGH  
AND YOU'RE  
SHIT  
YOU COULD HAVE HAD **LIFE** YOU KNOW?  
AND I'M JUST  
IM JUST HERE!!!!  
STUCK IN SPACE TIME  
TRAPPED, LIKE STUCK SO DEEP IN SPACE TIME  
SO FUCKING FAT THAT I LITERALLY DESTROY EVERYTHING AROUND  
ME  
AND NOT EVEN AROUND ME  
LIKE YOU WERENT CLOSE I BET  
YOU FLEW ALL THE WAY OVER HERE FOR LIKE HOW LONG, RIGHT?

like  
ten thousand years

TEN  
JESUS, ten *thousand* years?????  
and -- !

and, hey.

there was this  
there was this asteroid  
that flew  
really close to me  
and was engulfed  
totally engulfed  
in this  
blue flame?  
it was **really** cool  
like *magical*  
like once in a lifetime kind of  
magical.

and  
you know?  
i just got  
a lot of  
time....

which is really valuable!  
you know?  
to think....  
and  
reflect  
on what i knew  
and what i thought  
and *how* i thought  
and  
i don't know....  
i just like,  
got to be present.

that sounds corny

but it was *really* fun  
and also,  
yeah. boring  
scary, totally  
but....  
i just got to a good place about things  
i'm not worried.

but...

hang on,  
i'm not done

like  
i just kinda  
got to be pulled down  
a river  
for like  
so long  
and it was  
slow  
like, gentle  
this just  
gentle tug?  
for like  
SO long,  
you know?

it was sweet.  
this constant tug....  
it was really soft  
and i kinda fell in love with it.  
the tug  
i don't know if that means  
i fell in love with you  
but.

i don't know  
this just feels....  
obvious?  
right? i don't know....

like for SO long i didn't know  
i couldn't even FATHOM what was  
pulling me...  
thought for a while  
that there might not even be  
anything....pulling me

that i was just like,

floating on my own....  
 like i was like....  
 broken or something  
 god.....

but no!  
 no!!  
 it was  
 you're a **black hole!**  
 that's so cool!!  
 look at you!!  
 it just makes sense.

and i get to meet you?!  
 i get to actually **have** like,  
 an answer?!?!?

to this question i've had for like, pshh  
 for forever?

**that's** so cool.  
 that's **so** cool....

*and then  
 the star was close enough  
 that its matter started being lifted  
 from its surface*

*and the planet really felt it  
 felt the transition.*

*and,  
 it made a lot of sense*

*and  
 the black hole  
 wished more than anything else  
 that it didn't feel like it made sense*

*but it did feel like it make sense.  
 made so much sense to them both.*

*and the planet was consumed.*

*fallen into the black hole's weight.*

*and the black hole's hum  
took over the vacuum once again.*

*and the black hole  
cried  
with a lot of tension  
and self-hatred  
and confusion  
and love  
but mostly grief*

*because it had destroyed  
this fuckin' planet!  
you know?*

*but.....*

*well....  
okay okay, now this is just **me** speaking  
like, miles  
this is just miles now*

*okay....so  
what's that law?....*

*that matter....*

*cannot be created or....*

*destroyed? right?*

*well....*

*then....*

*doesn't that mean....*

*somewhere in there....*

*somewhere **in***

*this grief-stricken black hole*

*idk, maybe even in its grief?*

*doesn't the planet have to be in there somehow?*

*it like,*

*CAN'T be gone....*

*even if it is just....*

***in** the black hole's grief....*

*can grief maybe....*

*carry with it....*

*some sort of*

*....life?*

**9. He says he keeps the lights off to save power, but....**

*okay.....i'm ready now.*

the 92 year old white man  
uttered this  
while sat on the side of his bed.

he had arthritis  
and a broken rib that was healing very slowly.

he had a memory that was fading  
and an enthusiasm that was all but dust.

...most importantly, though  
he had on a birthday hat

one of those plastic cone birthday hats  
one with a thin string that wrapped around his chin  
which, to his old skin,  
felt a lot like razor wire

and was opening him up  
slowly,  
to reveal some blood  
some old blood

but he couldn't take the hat off with his fingers  
because of his arthritis

and he couldn't ask one of his children  
to take it off  
because he'd forgotten their names.

(who were in the other room)

and he didn't want them to know  
he'd forgotten their names  
so he just made  
some joke about how he  
was going to wear the hat forever  
and then he closed the door to his large bedroom

and sat  
 in silence  
 and embarrassment.  
 alone  
 and in pain.  
 confused.  
 talking to a god he didn't believe in  
 telling them,

*i'm ready to die now.*

and the silence that followed  
 this request  
 was so deafening  
 and so unsurprising  
 and yet still so heart-breaking

and the man,  
     who has a name  
     but who can't remember it right now

*could* remember so many times in his life  
 where he felt jovial  
 and excited  
 and even,  
 in the times when he *had* felt suffering  
 that he also felt some  
 complicated **combination** of feelings  
 during those moments  
     grief mixed with love  
     heartbreak mixed with new life  
     confusion mixed with rage  
 so much complex feeling.

but now  
 he felt....

so....

plain?

so **plainly** sad....

so **plainly** sorrowful.

*why....why would any sort of god let something this pitiful  
even exist?*

he said those words out loud.  
and he meant them.  
asked them genuinely.

*isn't something....this....ugh, my god  
**pathetic?**  
shouldn't something this pitiful  
be taken out?  
....you clean stains off the bathroom tiles, don't you?  
you wash clothes when there's some wretched smell, don't you?*

and  
then  
the only sound in the room was the ceiling fan

he wanted to be dead.  
so badly  
he wanted to be dead.

*you think it'll get **better** than this?*

he was mad now.  
he was starting to cry.  
he was scared now.

*you think it'll **turn around** after this???*

*i'm done!*

*it's over for me*

*....it's been over for so long  
for me*

*\*sigh\**

and....  
outside the nameless man's room  
were his 4 children  
Marcy, Deborah, Wolf, and Lee  
with *their* collective 6 children  
Kristen, Mako, Hue, Lily, Florence, and Keenan  
who sat in front of an indoor fire  
holding glasses of wine and scotch  
and sparkling apple cider

laughing  
and complaining  
in a whisper,  
about their  
“handful”  
of a father.

which,  
bonded them all  
together

ravings which,  
the grandkids collectively listened to  
like a bedtime story

the complaints about this old  
man  
were their shared lullaby.

and this family lore,  
would bind the 6 grandchildren together  
for the rest of their lives  
creating a real sense of  
community  
between them all.

so,  
their grandfather’s self-identified pitifulness  
and their parents’ disdain for it...  
brought them all together?

and would be something  
they would all use to  
connect  
until the nameless man died.

6 years  
later....

.....

and even still,  
even after that,  
they would all  
*still*  
talk about  
**bond** over  
just how much of a handful  
he could be.

was.

even still....

**10. a poem.**

*we we there,  
at the beginning of everything.*

*we were there,  
in the total darkness  
and in the total darkness  
we were there.*

*when each sound came into existence  
each sight to see  
each feeling to feel*

*we saw them roll in like a parade  
some ecstatic goop  
filling up the beaker of this existence*

*until it was full  
of everything  
everything there ever was  
and everything there ever would be*

*and we took none of it for granted.*

*because we were there,  
awake before the birds started chirping*

*awake to see every thing  
wake up  
for the very first time  
with those baby blue bird eyes  
that didn't know a single thing that was in store*

*and  
we got to know what the sky sounded like*

*when it was quiet.....*

*we were there to know what it was like*

*when it was quiet.....*

■ ■ ■

■ ■ ■

■ ■ ■

■ ■ ■

*time had passed.*

*so much time had passed that all these stories now felt dated.  
felt from another time.  
a younger time.*

.....

*and the person came back....  
to the garden!*

*yeaaaaah, the person who was in the garden?  
who at one point was in it with two people but now....  
mold over the eyes?  
remember?  
the two people who went blind with the mold  
and then were just wandering around the garden forever?*

*well, yeah, they eventually left that garden  
duh.*

*they definitely didn't think they ever would  
but they did.*

*the mold on their eyes eventually started hardening over  
and then started cracking,  
chipping.*

*slowly, for sure  
but after a while one of them could see just a bit again  
and tore off the remaining chunks of mold stuck to their eyelids....*

*and then, yeah....  
left....*

*and then,  
some time later....  
the other one of them started to see as well  
saw that they were just wanderin' 'round*

*the same old garden,  
and, tearing off the rest of their mold  
they also...  
after breathing for a while,  
left.*

*and now...  
after a long time,  
one of them has come back  
to the garden.*

jesus.

*the person muttered  
as they stood at the foot of it all.*

*the garden had grown wildly.  
had grown completely unhinged  
the grass had a height minimum of 3 and a half feet tall  
walking through it would mean completely submerging most of their body in the grass  
and there were trees and vines that spiraled dozens of feet up into the sky  
up so high that the person couldn't even see the tops  
interlocking cross-sections of vegetation  
with slices of shade and sunlight beaming throughout*

anything could be in there...

*and it sure sounded like that....  
clicks and screeches and calls  
and howls and growls and roars  
all overlapping each other into some  
riotous cacophony*

*almost sounded like everything in the whole world was living within that garden.....*

*and the person looked down at where they were standing*

*and saw,*

*each of their legs absolutely covered  
in fucking mosquitos!!  
there were like 15 on each leg!!!*

**FUCK!**

*the person jumped!!  
violently swatting the bugs off of their body*

*which worked.  
the blood-suckers flew off  
back into their grassy fray*

*and then the person stood  
a few feet further back now,  
panting,  
looking out into  
this overgrown garden*

*and they  
then looked out passed the garden  
out at the horizon  
which was now showing sunset  
showing oranges and reds and a deep cool blue*

*and then they looked  
back out into the garden*

*at the over....growth.....  
which....  
really seems to have taken on a life of its own....*

*bugs and beasts and bushes  
.....an ecosystem*

*where did it all come from?  
the mold?*

.....  
*the two of them?  
did the two of them somehow make this?*  
.....

*the person sighed  
didn't know,  
and smiled to themselves.*

*and*

*without much attachment, simply muttered*

ah well.

*turned around.*

*and walked back home.*

.....  
.....

thanks,

-m

;